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EDUCATIONAL NEWS AND EDITORIAL COMMENT

THE KANSAS SILENT READING TESTS

“Yardstick men” like Courtis, Ayres, Grey, Freeman, and others, are the first to acknowledge that at the present development of the science of measuring there are three kinds of factors in reading, some that can be accurately measured, some that are only approximately measurable, and some that are distinctly non-measurable.

To the group of measurable factors belong the more mechanical attainments, like speed and accuracy of pronunciation; factors only approximately measurable may be represented by comprehension of the meaning of the printed page; factors not at all measurable may be represented by appreciation of the literary quality of the literature read. In other words yardsticks of definite units can give absolutely accurate measurements when they are applied to objects which are definitely capable of being broken up into units corresponding to the scale which measures them.

No franker admission of this limitation is to be found than the statement of Dean F. J. Kelly, the originator of the significant Kansas silent reading test. He set himself the problem of a test to measure the ability of children to get meaning from the printed page. He says forcefully:

The ability to interpret is a complex thing, but is nevertheless an ability which children are called upon to use in their everyday reading of geography, history, arithmetic, and the rest of the work of the school. It is the ability also which is used throughout life in all forms of reading. While it was realized that it would be advantageous to test separately the several elements which compose this complex ability to interpret the printed page, it seemed worth while to prepare a measure with which to determine how children compare in this complex ability, leaving for further study the determination of what constitutes the causes of the differences found.

In this citation, and in numerous others, Mr. Kelly acknowledges the magnitude of his task, and modestly claims for his tests only the virtue of an imperfect experiment. It is to be clearly understood then, that the Kansas tests, applied to nineteen cities, are frankly designed not to test the actual comprehension of the printed page by pupils; they are intended only to test the relative ability of corresponding groups of children to interpret the same problems of silent reading.

Now the fundamental question is whether the material set in the Kelly scales actually tests a pupil's power of comprehending, or whether the material is suitable for comparing the powers of comprehension of different pupils. Let us take, for example, the most difficult of the Kelly exhibits which high-school pupils are called upon to interpret.

At sea-level water boils at 212 degrees above zero on the Fahrenheit thermometer, and at 100 degrees above zero on the Centigrade thermometer. The zero point on the Centigrade thermometer represents the same temperature as 32 degrees on the Fahrenheit thermometer. A change in temperature which would raise the mercury in a Centigrade thermometer 5 degrees would raise the mercury in a Fahrenheit thermometer how many degrees? Answer.

For the sake of the teachers who give and mark the tests, in the *Bulletin of the Kansas Tests*, the answer to this problem is given as "9 degrees." To the uninitiated it appears that the ability to answer this question correctly is by no means a part of the ability to comprehend the problem. One may need to read the example more than once to be sure what the problem is. But when he can clearly restate what answer is required, he has comprehended, so far as reading is concerned. Ability to solve the problem, on the contrary, is a test of ability in mathematics or in physics. The Kelly method of scoring throws out entirely all incorrect answers, ranks them as indicative of no comprehension; it scores each correct answer as perfect comprehension. In other words, almost all the entire exhibits in the Kelly tests are puzzle problems in geography, history, science, mathematics. Granted, for argument's sake, that the ability to solve these problems is a suitable test of the schools' product, it appears to be quite unfair to lay either success or failure to the credit of the power of comprehending, of interpreting, the meaning of the written page.

We might as well, by the logic used in the Kelly tests, estimate a child's ability to solve a problem in arithmetic by the legibility of his handwriting, and by the accuracy of his spelling. The ability to comprehend swiftly and accurately the meaning of a printed page, in subject-matter with which a pupil is or ought to be readily at home, is far more important than the rapidity and accuracy of his oral pronunciation of words. Granted. To this ability all of the subjects of study in a child's schooling contribute. But ability to comprehend and ability to solve are two very distinct abilities. Any scale which attempts to measure the former, with units which are strictly applicable only to the latter, may be severely questioned as unscientific.

ORIENTING STUDENTS

A new course at Brown University described by A. D. Mead in a recent number of *School and Society* is not only of interest in itself, but also furnishes a suggestion for city high schools. Mr. Mead calls his plan an "orientation course for Freshmen." Educators have long lamented the fissure between high-school work and college work without any very active movement being made to bridge the gap. It is complained on the one hand that students in high schools are not made familiar with college methods, and on the other, that Freshmen waste much good time in choosing courses in college. What is to be done?

Brown University is this year trying the very simple and straightforward experiment of giving freshmen a series of lectures or talks about the college. The express purpose of the course is to help the new students to adjust or orient themselves so that their four years of college may be both enjoyable and permanently satisfactory.

The lectures are given weekly during term time, beginning the first week of college and extending to about the first of May. Attendance is required but no examinations or tests are held. A printed syllabus with blank pages for notes is given out at the beginning of each lecture. A cover is provided for safe keeping of syllabi and notes. These are handed in for inspection at stated intervals, about four times during the year, and are then returned to the students.

The lectures fall into two general groups. The first eight lectures deal with general matters and the remainder, except the last one, with the subjects of the curriculum.

The faculty committee in charge adopts the principle:

That the division of the subject-matter should be made without regard to the departmental lines as they are more or less accidentally drawn at Brown, although the fields of all departments should be covered; that the lectures should undertake to explain to the freshmen the scope, value and extrinsic relations of the subjects discussed; that they should avoid the attempt to give an epitome of any course, or to develop a particular phase of it instead of a general explanation of its content; that references to particular courses or teachers in the university should as far as possible be avoided.

The *Brown Daily Herald*, which may be regarded as voicing representative student sentiment says:

The orientation course, although still in its infancy, has shown the university that it is an important and almost necessary part of the curriculum. Its popularity is gaining weekly among the new men. The information received is not only interesting but valuable. Such a course should be offered by the faculty to all students.

Mr. Mead's discussion suggests one thing we are fast forgetting in the tumult and the shouting over vocational education: namely, that large numbers of pupils are still attending high schools because they want to enter college or university afterward. It also pointedly indicates the lack of any systematic effort among secondary-school men to rationalize the pupils' choice of a higher institution of learning. If the pupil desires merely to select a trade he will, in up-to-date city systems, obtain expert advice. But if he desires to select a college, no one seems to worry about him.

As a result a high-school student enters a college for the esoteric reason that the football team appeals to him, or oftener because father or a favorite teacher is an alumnus of a particular school. If he seeks mature help in selecting a school, the best the student usually obtains is a hurried talk with the principal or vague advice from a friendly teacher; advice usually concentrated on the merits and demerits of school A, without much reference to the pupil's needs or the possibilities of schools B, C, D, and E.

Is it not possible in larger high schools to do for pupils preparing for advanced study something like what is being done for their fellows who are preparing to earn a livelihood? The course at Brown suggests that in the Senior year a system of general talks be given on the choice of colleges, just as Brown Freshmen are given talks on the choice of courses. Two methods are possible: the detailing of a member of the school faculty for that purpose, or the securing of a list of speakers, possibly alumni of the schools represented. Such lectures should in the end be impartial; they should undertake sympathetically to present the "scope, value, and extrinsic relations" of colleges or of classes of colleges; they should attempt a general statement of life-values as particular types of higher education represent them. They ought to lead to a more thoughtful consideration by the Seniors of the question of choosing a college.

Such a series of talks would have twice the value of much of the fodder given high-school students at general assemblies. The *School Review* submits that in the enthusiasm for the vocational the importance of the relations of high school and college is being slighted. High-school men have usually walked daintily around the problem that Brown is undertaking to solve, or have thrust the responsibility upon the colleges. The high schools must themselves prepare for a considerable portion of their students a topographical map of the country beyond the boundary where the school men cannot go, if only to make the pupil realize that the country there has a geography.

SHAKESPEARE AND THE SCHOOLS

The Bureau of Education estimates that nearly 2,000 schools have already arranged for a pageant or dramatic performance in commemoration of the three hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death. Many elementary and secondary schools will this year present at commencement a Shakespeare play. Among the summer schools outdoor performances of plays by the master, or about him, will be the rule.

Other signs of activity are the issuing or republishing of school editions of Shakespeare; the writing for school consumption of plays, more or less competent, about Shakespeare, of which Garnett's *Master Will of Stratford* (MacMillan) is one of the best; and community or school lectures, domestic or imported, dealing with the immortal bard. The March number of the *Teachers College Record* is made a "Shakespeare Festival Number." The Drama League, with the Bureau of Education, has issued an informational bulletin about the "kinds of celebration, type performances, lists of dances, and designs for simple costuming of Shakespearean plays." In this connection it is well to remember the very valuable Ben Greet Shakespeare (Doubleday, Page & Co.), acting versions of the plays "for young readers and amateur players," prepared by that sympathetic veteran Shakespearean Mr. Ben Greet.

The bulletin of the Bureau of Education emphasizes "the special opportunity afforded by the Shakespeare Tercentenary to co-ordinate the school work in literature, music, and art with such practical subjects as shopwork and physical education," a recommendation calculated to make the judicious grieve. The idea of the *Midsummer-Night's Dream* hitched up to a lathe in the manual-training shop and leading zealously to the proper sawing of boards may well cause Master Will of Stratford to smile grimly in his grave. Let us have two or three things for enjoyment still, the *Tempest* and *As You Like It* among them.

The specific ends of the Shakespeare celebrations ought to be two: first, the increasing of a love of poetry; and second, the furthering of interest in the play. To these ends gymnastics and the pounding-in of nails ought to be strictly subordinated.

The last problem that the high-school faculty is today prepared to face is the problem of the theater in its own town. To all intents and purposes the school ignores the fact that cities frequently support theaters wherein persons called actors occasionally present plays. The Shakespeare Tercentenary will go badly astray among pedagogues if it does not lead to a more thoughtful consideration of the plays young people go to see and of the plays young people ought to go to see. The

class in *Macbeth*, as an editorial in this journal once observed, usually ends in a vaudeville house; the young idea can go quite blithely from a theme on Hamlet's ethics to the sugary inanities of *Pollyanna*. Why should they sense any incongruity when their English teachers lead the way?

The study of Shakespeare must not lapse this year into either rhapsody or manual training; it must lead directly to the local playhouse those advanced classes wherein Shakespeare is really taken up; to a study of, and judgment on, the plays there presented; to an inquiry into the causes of the woeful lack of good traveling productions; to the activities of the Drama League, the star-system, the Little Theater, and the general drift of drama in America. If this program seems heavy, let it be observed that high-school students are required to analyze Hamlet's madness, which even the great Goethe could not judge; and to discourse in themes of the dramatic technique of *Macbeth*. A study of the stage is no more difficult than a study of civics or of history, and socially it will be vastly profitable.

THE GARY PLAN AGAIN

Superintendent J. H. Van Sickle presents in a recent bulletin a compact summary of the arguments for and against the Gary plan. He says:

The Gary plan is advocated largely, but not exclusively, on the ground of lower cost. There are those, however, whose approval is based upon the claim that by means of a longer school day it affords to the children wider opportunities for work, study, and play; that it distributes the burden of teaching more evenly over the entire teaching staff; and that it affords prevocational training to all children in all of the grades instead of confining such work to a small group of children in the seventh and eighth grades. It promises: (1) an enriched school life for every pupil; (2) a co-ordination of all existing child-welfare agencies and a fuller utilization of all facilities in present public and private recreational and educational institutions; (3) a solution of the part-time problem; (4) a double school plan by which each school seat serves two children; (5) a wider use of the school plant; (6) an increase in the school day through a co-ordination of work, study, and play activities; (7) a program that would invest the child's nonacademic time to greater profit and pleasure; (8) a socialized education in harmony with progressive thought of the day.

On the other hand, those who oppose the immediate and wholesale adoption of the duplicate plan for the elimination of part-time express doubt as to certain novel features of school administration which it embodies, such as departmental teaching for all children from the first year through the eighth,

instruction of groups of children by pupils instead of teachers, the grouping together of younger and older pupils for auditorium, laboratory, and workshop exercises, the substitution of an auditorium period for classroom instruction, the omission of formal physical training, supervised play with only four teachers for twelve classes, the deferring of scholastic work for first-year children until late in the afternoon. They urge that sufficient time has not elapsed to test the worth of the schemes.

A further criticism is that outside instruction in the home or in the church is permitted, but that no means is provided for seeing that such instruction is the equivalent of regular schooling.

To this criticism the reply is made that it would be very unfortunate if the school undertook to insure that such instruction should be the equivalent of regular schooling, for in that case the school would be supervising religious instruction which the law expressly prohibits. The program simply provides that the child can be excused during the day to take private lessons at home or attend religious instruction, if the parent so desires. These periods are never taken from the academic work and therefore do not detract from the regular work of the school. As in the case of play and auditorium, it is simply time which, in the traditional school, the child would spend upon the street. What is taught in these outside classes and how it is taught is not and should not be the concern of the school.

This excellent brief is given special interest by the publication of the Buckingham report on the New York Gary schools (*Seventeenth Annual Report of the City Superintendent of Schools . . . of New York*). Mr Buckingham selected two Gary schools; six "Ettinger schools" and eight elementary schools of the traditional type for his investigations. Two tests in arithmetic problems, spelling, geography, history, and English grammar were given to pupils of the seventh and eighth grades in these institutions, the object being to "determine to what extent the Gary and the prevocational schools were able, as contrasted with the regular schools of the city system, to give effective instruction in certain fundamental subjects." Without going into the details of the tests or their limitations which the report wisely concedes, it is important to observe that in both tests the Gary schools ranked lowest, the order being control schools, prevocational schools, and Gary schools. The report, declares Superintendent Maxwell, "raises a strong presumption against the general introduction of the Gary system in this city."

Mr. Buckingham is not without his opponents. Mr. Howard W. Nudd of the Public Education Association of New York, writing in *School and Society* for April 8, charges not only that the spirit of the Buckingham report is wrong, but that its scientific character is impeachable. According to Mr. Nudd the report assumes that—

after six or more years of educational experience, progress in general ability during a period of three months results solely from the training received during that period. . . . Public School 45, the Bronx, was a traditional school up to within three weeks of the first test in March and was still in process of readjustment during the period immediately following, in which the growth in ability due to the Gary plan was supposed miraculously to take place. Public School 89, Brooklyn, was also a traditional school up to within four months of the March test, and was likewise undergoing readjustment.

These are the two "Gary schools"; Mr. Nudd concludes that what "Mr. Buckingham was really testing was not the Gary plan at all. . . ."

From a statistical point of view, according to this writer, Mr. Buckingham was again unfair in comparing the average results in two schools against the average results in six schools and the average results in eight, since the difficulties of a particular Gary school are thereby given undue weight. Yet Mr. Nudd concludes from a re-examination of the Buckingham figures that "despite the tremendous odds under which the two Gary schools were tested, they made an exceptional showing as compared with other schools," when tested by the standard of individual improvement rather than of absolute attainment. The writer therefore concludes that the report really renders the Gary schools a service "by demonstrating what they can do under extremely unfavorable conditions."

The upshot of the controversy seems to be on the one hand that the Buckingham report is premature as a judgment on the Gary schools, and on the other hand (despite the ingenious figures of Mr. Nudd) that they have not done as well in the traditional subjects as their enthusiastic champions had proclaimed. In the meantime readers are referred to the excellent book by Randolph S. Bourne (*The Gary Schools*) for a presentation of the Gary plan; and, in the appendix, to an outline of Mr. Wirt's reorganization of the two New York schools around which the controversy rages.

VOCATIONAL TESTS

At the meeting of the National Society for the Study of Education at Detroit a study was reported by Professor G. M. Whipple which suggests interesting possibilities. Up to the present time the problem of vocational guidance has been approached chiefly from the point of view of the social opportunities or demands, and in some measure from the point of view of the interests of the candidates for positions. Only slight attempts have been made to analyze the abilities of candidates.

Professor Whipple found that a certain test (the analogies test) gave a high correlation with standing in algebra. This helps us to define the kind of ability which enables a pupil to do well in this subject. If we can carry this process of analysis forward far enough, it may be possible to interpret the meaning of the pupil's standing in the various school subjects sufficiently to use this information in determining the intellectual elements in his vocational fitness.

THE COLLEGE GRADUATE AND THE COMMUNITY CENTER: A NEW FIELD OF CAREER

The community centers, rapidly growing up in school buildings, library buildings and parks, and public buildings all over the country, are at once public institutions and a form of business enterprise. They are a phase of public education, and at the same time a new organ for political action. They are social service, but they pay their own way. It has been suggested of late, by James Ford, of the Department of Social Ethics of Harvard, that the American community center is really a branch of the Consumers' Co-operative Movement, which in Europe holds the allegiance of more than ten million families, and deals in goods, physical and spiritual, to the value of billions of dollars each year.

This new phase of public works will be discussed for four days at a national conference, to be held in New York beginning April 19. Among those who have signed the call for the conference are: Professor John Dewey, Columbia University; Professor John R. Commons, University of Wisconsin; Raymond B. Fosdick, of the New York Board of Education; Luther H. Gulick, president of the Camp Fire Girls of America; William H. Maxwell, superintendent of the New York schools; Joseph Lee, president of the Playground and Recreation Association of America; Henry Bruere, city chamberlain of New York; Margaret Woodrow Wilson; Thomas D. Wood, director of the physical education of Teachers College; Charles McCarthy, Madison, Wisconsin; P. P. Claxton, United States Commissioner of Education.

In a statement issued by John Collier, secretary of the national conference, and director of the New York Training School for Community Center Workers, the following occurs:

If self-support, or even a large measure of self-support, can be developed in community centers, there becomes possible a growth to which no limits can be set. The development of public recreation and of social service, and our extension education generally, is narrowly limited at present by the limitations

of taxation. Where these purposes receive annual allowances of tens or hundreds of thousands, in a large city, they should receive allowances of millions. The private expenditure on motion-picture exhibits in New York City is nearly ten times the total public appropriation for recreation.

It has already been proved, not in one but in dozens of community centers, that a large part of the work can be developed on a frankly economic basis, the beneficiaries of the service paying directly for what they get, and furthermore assuming a governing responsibility for the enterprise. The need for trained leaders becomes greater, not less, through this new circumstance, and the trained leaders are decidedly not to be had.

If community centers can be developed in 10 per cent of the tens of thousands of public buildings in cities and rural districts of America, this will mean the opening up of careers to not less than thousands of educated men and women, and these careers, while not without an academic significance, will be primarily careers of initiative and action.

The summer meetings this year of the National Education Association and the American Library Association occur in successive weeks, the library meetings being held June 26 to July 1, at Asbury Park, New Jersey, followed in the next week by the National Education Association at New York. Library and educational people will thus have another opportunity for conference on their mutual problems, which are becoming more and more similar. The library conference will feature democracy in education. Miss Mary W. Plummer, of the Library School of New York Public Library, is president of the American Library Association; Mr. George B. Utley, 78 East Washington Street, Chicago, the secretary.

The high-school principals, who were in Chicago, organized a National Association of Principals of secondary schools. The officers elected were: Principal B. F. Brown, Lake View High School, president; U. R. Daniels, Oak Park, vice-president, and S. M. Hammitt, secretary and treasurer. The members of the Executive Committee in addition to the foregoing are: D. R. Bishop, Detroit; Mr. Church, of Cicero, and T. R. Newlan, of Lincoln, Neb.